

The Village libraries

An experience of UGPM in Senegal



A village library is:

A place - A library
in community
premises

A suitcase or truck -
A travelling library

The objectives

- To consolidate literacy skills
- To prevent illiteracy from returning
- To promote the culture of writing and reading
- To promote the production of written material based on local knowledge
- To develop organisational and technical skills for involvement in community life



Difficulties encountered

- Maintenance of contact persons
- Regular supply of literature
- Mobilisation of resources for activities and their follow-up

The functioning of a village library

- The library is managed by the community so that the villagers see it as their own heritage to be safeguarded.
- A literate relay person is chosen to be responsible and trained for the management of the library.
- This person works in conjunction with the community management committee.

- Guided reading sessions are held with neo-literates, sometimes on the basis of themes seen in training, for example: breeding techniques or agro-ecology.
- Regular activities are proposed to encourage attendance: writing workshops on one's experience or traditional knowledge, storytelling sessions by parents for children, writing poems or proverbs in Wolof, etc.

The library is supplied with books, brochures and newspapers from UGPM, other organisations and traditional distribution networks.



The Village libraries

A role of capitalisation and valorisation of local knowledge



A variety of activities

The workshops run by the village libraries include:

- workshops on writing about one's experience or traditional knowledge
- storytelling sessions by parents for children
- writing poems or proverbs in Wolof...

Local information sources

The libraries receive information from local resource persons:

- Village elders
- Social and/or technical agents of the state working in the village
- Agents of support organisations
- Traditional practitioners
- Farmers and researchers



Diversified media

The libraries are supplied with productions such as:

- Written documents: newspapers, stories, drawings, decorations
- Audio: cassette, interview, music, or song.
- Photo album: stage of a given technique, experiences or achievements
- Theatres: for awareness-raising sessions
- Translation and adaptation of documents

Testimony of Habib Niasse

Habib Niasse was in charge of communication at UGPM when the village libraries were born.

"The libraries were supplied by a central library at the UGPM. The central library's main objective was to supply the village libraries with books, documents and technical booklets for the benefit of learners.

Topics covered

- Technical: local knowledge of interest to be disseminated, finding a solution to a gap in knowledge while first learning about what exists to be translated or adapted.
- Social: health, family planning, collective organisation
- Cultural: tales, legends, stories, etc.
- Education

With more than 600 books available, more than 2,000 learners and more than 500 farmers benefited from books on agriculture, livestock, arboriculture, reforestation, composting, etc. in order to maintain a literate environment and to develop their agricultural activities.

The Village libraries

An experience that nourishes the "Train to Transform" collective

An inspiring experience...

Village libraries were piloted by UGPM between 1994 and 2000. This experience feeds into the organisation's current strategy. Illiteracy is still present in rural Senegal.

State literacy programmes have become difficult to access. UGPM is therefore re-launching literacy courses for its farmers' groups.

This experience also inspires other organisations in Rwanda and the DRC.

Inspiration for APEF in DR of Congo

Develop libraries in the neighbourhoods to continue literacy training for women trained at the APEF sewing training centre.

Inspiration for the Recasé project in Rwanda

Develop libraries with grassroots community organisations that will receive literacy classes.



Questions

How to adapt libraries when not working with a community/village?

- > Relying on local reading centres?
- > Relying on women leaders?

Can literacy in the neighbourhoods be used as a recruitment strategy for the training centre?

Questions

- A complementary approach to the official state curriculum used in the project's literacy programmes?
- --> would provide emancipatory themes for community organisations

Inspiration for UGPM:

Relaunching village libraries for groups and villages that have participated in literacy training

Rely on local (endogenous) facilitators to run the libraries, in conjunction with selected relay persons in the villages.

Promote the new productions written in Wolof by UGPM: on the roles and responsibilities in the groups, on the relationships of domination

